



THE GLOBAL
PEACE INITIATIVE
OF WOMEN

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**AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO MEET AT ASPEN INSTITUTE
NOVEMBER 6-9TH FOR REFLECTION ON HOW TO GUIDE THE NATION**

Meeting aims to focus on the way forward following the National Elections

Aspen, CO, November 6, 2008 -- Religious leaders from throughout the country are coming together just after the election on November 4th to explore how they can join efforts to heal and bring the nation together around a shared spiritual agenda. During the past several years, the nation has become both politically and religiously polarized. This initiative is an effort to end these divisions by tapping the values shared by all religious traditions and by focusing on the vision of unity.

Organizers of the reflection have sought to identify the country's most respected contemplative leaders from across traditions, and those who through experience in interreligious work see the unifying values of the religious traditions; those who are not advocating for the superiority of any one faith and who are not promoting themselves or their church. The intention was to draw upon a collective wisdom to reflect on how to address the most pressing issues facing the nation – the economic crisis, increasing poverty, environmental degradation and climate change, and the atmosphere of fear that has permeated the nation since 9/11. The goal of the gathering is to bring forth a new type of contemplative action. “We have to come together across spiritual lines, because that is where the great mystical energy resides,” says Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, Co-Chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, the organizer of the gathering. “There is a type of activism that comes out of contemplation. Anything else is social action.”

The goal is to find a new vehicle for these respected leaders so their collective voices can provide guidance in times of crisis and be an inspiration for a new type of activism, based on love and compassion, rather than fear and anger. Included among the group are: Father Thomas Keating, senior monastic, St. Benedict's Monastery; Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder, the Jewish Renewal Movement; Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, chairman, American Buddhist Association; Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, renowned spiritual author; Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, former General Secretary, National Council of Churches; Swami Atmarupananda, senior monastic, Ramakrishna Mission; Imam Mohamed Bashar Arafat, founder and president, Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation; and Brother Achalananda, senior monastic, Self-Realization Fellowship, among many others. Over 80 religious leaders will gather for this national reflection from nearly every region in the country.

The premise of this gathering is that the spiritual landscape of America is changing. The religious voice that has dominated the country for the last many years represents the views of a minority of Americans. In the effort to gather the voices that have not been heard, an extensive search was

conducted to find respected American leaders from the Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi and other faith traditions in addition to contemplative Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders. Findings of the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life show that a majority of Americans today express an openness to a range of religious beliefs and a non-dogmatic approach to religion – no longer viewing their religion as the sole path to “salvation”. This is a reflection of the great diversity of religious affiliation and beliefs in America, but this diversity has not yet coalesced into a new voice. It is hoped that this gathering will facilitate this process.

So many of the challenges facing the nation have a strong moral or ethical component, whether it be poverty, climate change, disregard for the environment, the prevalence of fear, lack of trust in political and economic institutions, etc., and they raise serious questions about our national priorities and the direction of our nation. Yet there has been no forum or think tank through which spiritual leaders can collectively address the spiritual underpinnings of these issues, from a mutifaith perspective. With the election behind us, Americans must begin to come together and find the best avenue forward. It is expected that an ongoing forum will be formed through which the collective wisdom of our diverse religious traditions can come together to help shed light on how to deal with the pressing challenges ahead. “A new spiritual energy is emerging in the country,” says Dena Merriam, founder and convener of the Global Peace Initiative of Women. “Just as the political landscaping is changing, so too is the spiritual landscape. We must tap this new energy to gain a forward looking vision of how to advance our national wellbeing.”

Gathering Spiritual Voices of America: To Deepen Our Knowing of Oneness and Compassion as a Nation is being organized by the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW), a New York-based nonprofit founded by a multi-faith group of women spiritual leaders. Funding has been provided by the Fetzer Institute, Kalliopeia Foundation and private donations. Since its inception in 2002 at the United Nations in Geneva, GPIW has been working in many of the world's conflict areas, including Israel/Palestine, Sudan and Iraq, bringing women spiritual leaders to these regions to support peace dialogues. Based on the premise that to resolve deep conflicts, spiritual resources are needed to supplement and support political and economic efforts, GPIW's network of women spiritual leaders will continue this work to address some of the underlying causes that block resolutions to long-term conflict.

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About the Global Peace Initiative of Women

The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) was founded by a group of women religious and spiritual leaders to provide a global platform through which women and men, working in partnership, can foster the spiritual values of global unity, peacebuilding and the development of all the peoples of the world. GPIW is an international network of women and men who come together to tap our collective spiritual wisdom to stimulate reconciliation and healing in areas of conflict and post-conflict, and to deepen understanding of oneness, compassion and the principles of ahimsa (non-harm) as central tenets of life. We believe that a shift in consciousness is needed, a change in heart and mind, if we are as a global community to meet the challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and hunger, violence and conflict. Central to our work is the belief that the feminine qualities of wholeness, inclusion, and integration have a vital role to play in facilitating this shift and bringing greater balance to our world. Thus we make great effort to draw upon the resources of women spiritual leaders as we seek to empower these vital qualities. For more information, please visit <http://www.gpiw.org>.